



NEWS RELEASE

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Department of Health Awarded Grant to Study Autism in Utah

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Once thought to be rare, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) now appear to affect 1 in 250 children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has awarded the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) \$1.2 million to establish a registry to help learn how many Utah children ages 3-10 years of age have ASD.

ASD is a group of developmental disabilities caused by abnormal function of the brain, suspected to be due to genetic and environmental factors. The spectrum includes children with severe forms of autism requiring constant care to those with very mild symptoms, such as children with Pervasive Developmental Delay or Asperger's Syndrome. Children with ASD commonly have disrupted social relations, communication deficits, and unusual repetitive interests and behaviors.

“Support for this type of research is critical,” says George Delavan, M.D, Director of the UDOH's Division of Community and Family Health Services. “We know that more children are being identified with ASD — recent estimates of autism prevalence are more than double from those reported earlier.”

The research effort will be conducted jointly between the UDOH and the University of Utah's Health Sciences Center, Autism Research Program and Department of Psychiatry. Principal investigators, Drs. Judy Zimmerman and William McMahon hope to learn more about autism by having Utah participate with multiple registries throughout the country.

“The Utah registry will have important implications for service delivery and research into the prevalence, causes, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders.”

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The CDC reported that during the 2000-2001 school year, more than 15,000 children ages 3-5 years and more than 78,00 children ages 6-21 years in the United States were classified as having autism under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Utah Registry of Autism and Developmental Disabilities project expects to identify over 1,600 children with ASD's three through ten years of age living in Salt Lake, Davis and Utah Counties.

“The registry will provide significant benefits for Utah families,” states Carmen B. Pingree, an advocate for families with autism. “Not only will the registry assist providers in planning expansion of services, but it will increase public awareness and facilitate early intervention that is so vital to the child’s future.”

For more information about autism or the Utah Registry of Autism and Developmental Disabilities, call 801-584-8510 or email URADD@utah.gov

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